

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 18221 01 OF 02 201400Z

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ACTION SS-25

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P 201032Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8050

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 18221

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR UR US BG IN

SUBJECT: SOVIET VIEWS ON BANGLADESH

REF: SECTO 24040

1. SUMMARY. I CALLED ON DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER FIRYUBIN ON DECEMBER 19 TO PRESENT US VIEWS ON BANGLADESH (PER REFTEL) AND TO SEEK HIS. HIS ASSESSMENT REVEALED NO SURPRISES BUT WAS EXTREMELY TENTATIVE ABOUT THE PRESENT SITUATION AND THE NEW LEADERSHIP'S ABILITY TO COPE WITH ITS PROBLEMS. HE REPEATEDLY MENTIONED AN "OUTSIDE HAND" CASUING "PROVOCATIONS" AND ANTI-SOVIET DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH, AND SEEMED TO CONTRAST THE BANGALEES WISH TO SOLVE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS WITH THE BROADER NEED FOR "STABILITY" AND HARMONY THROUGHOUT THE SUBCONTINENT. I DEDUCE FROM HIS PRESENTATION THAT MOSCOW THINKS THAT THE CRISIS IS NOT YET OVER, THAT IT IS NOT ENCOURAGING INDIA TO INTERVENE BUT WOULD NOT WAST MUCH EFFORT TO DISSUADE IT, AND THAT ITS OVERRIDING CONCERN IS TO PREVENT ANY SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN PEKING'S INFLUENCE.
END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER EXCHANGING PLEASANTRIES, I NOTED THAT THE
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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 18221 01 OF 02 201400Z

SPECIAL ENVOY (FOREIGN SECRETARY HUSSAIN) OF THE PRESI-

DENT OF BANGLADESH HAD JUST LEFT MOSCOW AFTER TALKS WITH FIRYUBIN AND OTHERS. I THEN NOTED THAT THE US WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE APPARENT PASSING OF THE WORST OF THE RECENT CRISIS AND POINTED OUT THE DANGERS AND CONSEQUENCES OF POSSIBLE INDIAN INTERVENTION, DRAWING EXTENSIVELY ON PARAS 2,3,4 AND 5 OF REFTEL.

3. FIRYUBIN DID NOT REPLY TO MY POINTS SPECIFICALLY, BUT SAID THAT THE PRESENT BANGLADESH SITUATION WAS MURKY BUT SEEMED BETTER RECENTLY. IT DEVELOPED, HE SAID, BECAUSE OF THE MURDER OF SHEIK MUJIB AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY AND CLOSE ASSOCIATES (FIRYUBIN SEEMED GENUINELY MOVED BY THIS, MENTIONING HIS OWN RECOLLECTIONS OF MUJIB'S YOUNG SON). MOSCOW IS NATURALLY CONCERNED, HE SAID, BECAUSE THE REGION IS "NOT FAR" FROM THE SOVIET UNION AND THEREFORE OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE TO IT. MOSCOW SAW THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AS A CLEAR ATTEMPT BY "THIRD PARTIES" TO DESTABILIZE THE COUNTRY. THESE EVENTS, HE SAID, SHOWED AN "OUTSIDE HAND." THIS SITUATION POSED A GREAT DANGER TO THE SECURITY OF THE COUNTRY AND TO THE STABILITY OF THE REGION. WITHIN THE COUNTRY, "EXTREMISTS" BECAUSE ACTIVE, NOTABLY JALIL AND THE NSP, AS WELL AS "REACTIONARY RIGHTIST" EXTREMISTS. MUJIB HAD LOCKED UP THESE PEOPLE -- AND WITH GOOD REASONS. THEY DREW IN PART ON RELIGIOUS COMMUNAL FEELINGS, BUT ALSO ON "NATIONALISM." THE INFLUENCE OF SUCH IDEAS IS GREAT AMONG THE MASSES OF "ILLITERATE PEASANTS," SAID FIRYUBIN. THE SHOOTING OF INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER SEN WAS "DEFINITELY A PROVOCATION," THE POINT OF HIGHEST TENSION, HE WENT ON. "MANY" IN INDIA THEN ARGUED THAT A FORCEFUL REACTION WAS NECESSARY TO "SETTLE" THE PROBLEM, BUT THE GOI SHOWED GREAT RESTRAINT AND REFUSED TO BE PROVOKED.

4. THE SOVIET UNION BELIEVES, HE SAID, THAT BANGLADESH MUST SOLVE ITS OWN PROBLEMS, LISTING POVERTY AS ONE EXAMPLE. BUT MOSCOW "CANNOT BE INDIFFERENT," HE STRESSED, AND SAID THAT GOOD BANGLADESH-INDIA RELATIONS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT TO THE SOVIET. SPEAKING OF "SPECIAL ENVOY" HUSSAIN'S VISIT, HE POINTED OUT THAT HUSSAIN WAS DE FACTO FOREIGN MINISTER, SINCE HE WAS THE SENIOR OFFICIAL DEAL-
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SECRET

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 18221 01 OF 02 201400Z

ING EXCLUSIVELY WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ALTHOUGH THE PORTFOLIO WAS HELD BY THE PRESIDENT. FIRYUBIN SAID "FRANKLY" THAT THE QUESTION OF OUTSIDE INTERVENTION HAD COME UP DURING THE TALKS, "BUT IT WOULD NOT RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS." THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY STILL DOES NOT MEASURE UP TO MUJIB'S, HE SAID, REPEATING THAT MOSCOW "KNOWS" THAT THE PRESENT TURMOIL IS INSPIRED AND DIRECTED FROM OUTSIDE.

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 18221 02 OF 02 201437Z

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 18221

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5. MOSCOW WANTS TO SEE PEACE IN THE REGION AND STABILITY WITHIN BANGLADESH, HE SAID. HUSSAIN TOLD THE SOVIETS THAT THE BORDER WAS QUIET AND THAT REFUGEES WERE NOT A PROBLEM, SAID FIRYUBIN. BOTH INDIA AND BANGLADESH SEEMED SATISFIED WITH THE HIGH-LEVEL TALKS IN DELHI AND CALCUTTA, AND MRS. GNDHI HAD RECEIVED THE BANGALEE DELEGATION. THE TWO SIDES ARE NOW SET UP FOR FURTHER DIALOGUE. THE JOINT DOCUMENT IS A "POSITIVE STEP" IN CALLING FOR FRIENDSHIP, COOPERATION, GOOD NEIGHBORING RELATIONS, RESPECT FOR SOVEREIGNTY, ETC. "WE WOULD LIKE TO HOPE" THAT RELATIONS WILL BE GOOD, BUT "WE ARE NOT DISINTERESTED OBSERVERS," HE REPEATED. SOVIET POLICY IS DIRECTED AT THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS ON THE SUBCONTINENT, ESPECIALLY THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SIMIAL PROCESS BETWEEN PAKISTAN, INDIA AND BANGLADESH, SO THAT PEACE WILL PREVAIL. "OUR VIEW HAS NOT CHANGED," HE SAID.

6. FIRYUBIN THEN REVERTED TO "PROVOCATIONS" IN BANGLADESH AND MADE CLEAR THAT WHAT CONCERNED HIM MOST WERE ANTI-SOVIET MANIFESTATIONS. "IT'S NOT REGULAR," HE SAID, "BUT IT'S THERE," AND HE MENTIONED PRESS ARTICLES. "WHO CONTROLS THE HAND OF THE WRITERS?" HE ASKED RHE- TORICALLY, AND ANSWERED HIMSELF THAT THE ARTICLES WERE "WITHOUT DOUBT INTENDED AS PROVOCATIONS."

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 18221 02 OF 02 201437Z

7. TURNING TO THE FUTURE, FIRYUBIN SAID THAT NO ONE CAN TELL WHAT WILL HAPPEN. "WE ARE NOT PROPHETS," HE SAID. BUT MOSCOW WILL BE WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH CLOSELY AND IS AWARE THAT SOME INTERNAL FORCES DO NOT PROPERLY VALUE GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. THEY TREAT US "FRIVOLOUSLY," HE SAID, "BUT WE WANT GOOD RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH," HE STATED. HUSSAIN HAD SAID THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD BE "TEMPORARY." AND THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN THE FUTURE, REPORTEDLY IN 1977. PRESIDENT SAYEM SAYS THAT HE WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE USSR, THE US AND OTHER COUNTRIES. THINGS MAY IMPROVE; THE CROP WAS GOOD THIS YEAR, SAID FIRYUBIN. MOST IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, IS THAT THE "FORCES OF EXTREMISM" NOT BECOME ACTIVE IN THE COUNTRY. IF OUTSIDERS ARE ALLOWED TO INFLUENCE THE SITUATION, IF THEY SEND INFILTRATORS INTO THE COUNTRY, THAT WOULD BE VERY DANGEROUS.

8. I ASKED FIRYUBIN ABOUT HIS VIEWS OF THE PRESENT SECURITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY AND THE STATUS OF THE SOVIET CITIZENS. HE REPLIED THAT THE EMBASSY IS STILL AT FULL STAFF, BUT THAT "SOME" SOVIET DEPENDENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN REMOTE AREAS WHOSE TOURS WERE NEAR COMPLETION, HAD DECIDED TO COME BACK EARLY. MOSCOW HAD TAKEN NO EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES YET, HE SAID.

9. TO MY QUESTION ABOUT CURRENT INDIAN ATTITUDES, HE SAID THAT THE INDIANS HAD BEEN SATISFIED WITH THE BILATERAL TALKS, BUT "ONLY GOD KNOWS" WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING. ONE CANNOT SEE WHAT SORT OF INCIDENTS OR EVENTS WOULD CAUSE INDIA TO ACT, BUT A LARGE FLOW OF REFUGEES WOULD BE VERY TROUBLESOME. TENSIONS CAN RISE RAPIDLY IN THE SUBCONTINENT BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT CAUSES. IN ANY CASE, HE CONCLUDED, "EVERYONE'S INTERESTS" ARE BEST SERVED BY STABILITY IN THE REGION.

10. COMMENT: I FOUND NO SURPRISES IN FIRYUBIN'S REMARKS, BUT SEVERAL POINTS SEEM WORTH NOTING. FIRST HE (LIKE SOVIET MEDIA COMMENTATORS) DATED THE DISORDER FROM THE MURDER OF MUJIB, NOT FROM EARLY NOVEMBER, AND
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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 18221 02 OF 02 201437Z

HE MADE LITTLE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SITUATION AT

PRESENT AND THAT OF A MONTH AGO WHEN TENSIONS SEEMED HIGHER. SECOND, HE WAS NEARLY OBSESSED WITH THE UNNAMED "OUTSIDE HAND" IN THE DISORDERS, AND LEFT NO DOUBT THAT HE MEANT CHINA. THIRD, HE WAS CLEARLY DUBIOUS THAT THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP COULD COPE WITH ITS MANIFOLD PROBLEMS. FOURTH, HE SEEMED TO IMPLY A CONTRAST, OR AT LEAST A DISTINCTION, BETWEEN THE BANGALEES' DESIRE TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN PROBLEMS AND THE BROADER NEED FOR REGIONAL STABILITY.

11. I DEDUCE FROM THE LATTER POINT THAT THE SOVIETS ARE LESS CONCERNED ABOUT PREVENTING POSSIBLE INDIAN INTERVENTION THAN THEY ARE THAT IT SUCCEED DECISIVELY IF UNDERTAKEN. FIRYUBIN SEEMED TO ACCEPT MY POINT ABOUT THE BURDEN WHICH INDIA WOULD BE TAKING ON, BUT HE LEFT NO DOUBT THAT FROM MOSCOW'S STANDPOINT THE QUESTION OF REGIONAL STABILITY, AND BY EXTENSION THE PREVENTION OF A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN PRC INFLUENCE IN THE AREA, WERE MORE IMPORTANT TO MOSCOW THAN THE CONCERNS OF THE BANGALEES. I WOULD NOT CONCLUDE FROM THIS THAT THE SOVIETS ARE ENCOURAGING THE INDIANS, BUT FROM FIRYUBIN'S PRESENTATION IT CAN BE INFERED THAT THEY MIGHT NOT DO MUCH TO DISCOURAGE THEM EITHER.

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